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HOUSEHOLD CALENDAR

Labels for Blankets

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U. S. Department of Agriculture

A radio dialogue between Miss Ruth Van Deman, Bureau of Home Economics, and Mr. Wallace Kadderly, Office of Information, broadcast Thursday, February 3, 1938, in the Department of Agriculture period, National Farm and Home Hour, by the National Broadcasting Company and a network of 93 associated radio stations.

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MR. KADDERLY:

Here's Ruth Van Deman, your home economics reporter, just back this morning from a conference in New York, where she tells me questions of particular interest to consumers were discussed.

Ruth, who did you say called this conference?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

The Consumer-Retailer Relations Council.

MR. KADDERLY:

That's a new organization to me.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

It still is to lots of people.

MR. KADDERLY:

Then I'm not the only one.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Oh my, no. This council has only been meeting about a year.

MR. KADDERLY:

What's the idea of it?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

To give consumers and trade groups a chance to get together and talk over ways and means of improving buying and selling.

MR. KADDERLY:

Buying and selling - that's an old, old game.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

But this is a new slant on the old game. As somebody up at the conference remarked, there have been more changes in the rules on the selling side especially in the last 50 years than in the preceding 5,000 years.

MR. KADDERLY:

The whole thing's much less direct and personal these days.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

That's it, exactly. Nowadays, when you go to buy a shirt, Wallace, I

(over)

think you probably look for a printed label about size and whether the fabric is color fast ---

MR. KADDERLY:

And shrink-proof. So the shirt won't be too small after it's washed the first time.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Learned your lesson on that.

MR. KADDERLY:

You bet I have.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

And for all that you and the storekeeper take the word of the manufacturer who probably has his factory a thousand miles from the store where you're buying the shirt.

MR. KADDERLY:

Sure. He's the fellow who knows.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Of course he is. But if anything goes wrong with the shirt you take it back to the store.

MR. KADDERLY:

But too often I called it just too bad - and took my loss. So now unless a shirt has a good label that tells about quality, I don't buy it. I look for one that has.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

You should have been at this conference in New York. Informative labels on consumer goods were one of the main things on the agenda.

MR. KADDERLY:

My nickel's worth wouldn't have mattered.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

You're mistaken. It would. The retailer and the manufacturer want to know what the consumer wants to know about the goods he buys. That's the first step toward working out good labels.

MR. KADDERLY:

Well, I should think the research you home economics people are doing would help.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Oh yes, there has to be good laboratory research behind labels that give real facts.

MR. KADDERLY:

And those guides you've put out to help in buying sheets, and blankets, and ---

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Turkish towels, yes. And women's coats and dresses. Oh yes, Miss O'Brien suggested labels for all those classes of goods.

MR. KADDERLY:

Tell us about the one on blankets. They're a timely topic right now - almost as timely as onions last week.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Almost. Well, for all these labels there was a general pattern that covered: what the article's made of, how it's made, what it will do, and how to care for it.

MR. KADDERLY:

What an engineer might call performance, composition, construction, and upkeep.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Exactly. And if you were the household engineer trying to decide which blankets to buy to keep the family warm on a February night, I think first thing you'd want to know is what they were made of.

MR. KADDERLY:

Sure. I'd look for a tag that said all-wool.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Yes, but you might find some that said "Part-wool not less than 25 percent."

MR. KADDERLY:

What would that mean?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

It might mean a cotton core yarn.

MR. KADDERLY:

A cotton core yarn?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Yes. C-o-r-e, like the core in an apple. A fine cotton yarn with the wool fibers twisted around it to give strength to the blanket fabric. The wool fibers on the outside of the yarn are brushed up to make the fluffy nap that gives a blanket warmth.

MR. KADDERLY:

That sounds all right.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Certainly it is, so long as you know what you're getting. If you pay an all-wool price you want all wool.

MR. KADDERLY:

Is there any trade agreement about marketing blankets with their fiber content?



MISS VAN DEMAN:

A purely voluntary one. About five years ago a group of manufacturers got together and worked out with the National Bureau of Standards a so-called Commercial Standard. The firms that adopted that agreed to follow certain rules whenever they labeled their blankets all-wool and part-wool. But if you or I wanted to manufacture blankets and sell them under the name of Kadderly, or Van Deman, or some fancy brand name, and say nothing about wool, or cotton, or whatever we made them of, we could still do that.

MR. KADDERLY:

I understand. The way things stand now, some blankets are labeled and some are not.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

That's right. But this ideal label they were talking about at this conference would give the exact percentage of wool, or cotton, or other fibers in the blanket, and in the binding. By the way, the binding is important. It sometimes fades or wears out long before the blanket does.

MR. KADDERLY:

But it's fairly easy to replace.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Yes, but that takes time and new material. Margaret Hays, who's done our laboratory tests, thinks if you have to economize on blankets fancy bindings are the best place to do it. She'd put the money into getting a good warm blanket fabric, and take a blanket stitch finish on the ends, the way the hotels and hospitals do. They don't go in for fancy bindings very often, but of course they insist on good firm stitching.

MR. KADDERLY:

Very practical point.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

And size is another one. Most blankets now are marked with the length and width, but you need to check that with the size of the beds you're going to use them on.

MR. KADDERLY:

And the length of the people who're going to sleep under them.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Yes, nothing harder on a tall person than a short blanket on a cold night.

MR. KADDERLY:

Especially if he happens to be a guest in a strange house.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

And left his overcoat downstairs. Well, a good general rule is to take the length and thickness of the mattress, plus 6 inches for tuck-in at the foot, plus a few inches more for take-up by the body and shrinkage when the blanket is washed.

MR. KADDERLY:

Which makes the standard length about what?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

84 inches. Some are made 90.

MR. KADDERLY:

I heard one man say he'd never been so comfortable as since his wife bought one of the 90 inch blankets.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Fortunately, blanket sizes have been standardized in the last 10 years, so you don't have to bother with the odd shapes there used to be. But there's still the question of weight and warmth.

MR. KADDERLY:

What is the answer on that?

MISS VAN DEMAN:

We don't have the final word yet. But this ideal label would call for weight per square yard - which would be a help in comparing two all-wool blankets say. If they were made the same way, the one with more wool in it would probably be warmer.

MR. KADDERLY:

But I've slept under very heavy blankets that were stiff as boards and not warm at all.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Yes. It depends partly on how much nap there is to hold in air. This ideal label would give warmth in terms of heat transmission.

MR. KADDERLY:

An index of insulating value.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

That's the real way to measure how warm a blanket can be. And this label would carry a line about color fastness to light, and washing, and dry cleaning.

MR. KADDERLY:

The old red and black plaids certainly held their color.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

There's no reason why wool shouldn't hold its color forever and amen.

MR. KADDERLY:

No reason at all. It takes dye more easily than any other textile fiber.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Just about. Of course colored blankets have their waves of style like everything else. Just now the trend seems to be away from the pastel shades toward the deeper tones. And I've noticed blankets in tans, and browns, and gold color.

MR. KADDERLY:

Very serviceable.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Very. And back to our label once more. Everybody at this conference thought that every label on a blanket ought to carry some directions about cleaning - whether it's washable or should be dry cleaned. And if it's washable, some cautions about doing it in lukewarm water, neutral soap, and drying in warm air.

MR. KADDERLY:

Yes. I heard your talk about washing woolens a few weeks ago.

MISS VAN DEMAN:

Well, that about finishes up the blanket label. You'll have to come over to our laboratory some day, Wallace, and see Miss Hays running the heat transmission tests.

MR. KADDERLY:

I'd like to do that. And thank you, Ruth, for coming back from the conference in New York in time to give us this interesting report. We'll be looking for you again next Thursday.

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